

Delegate, colleagues introduce Omnibus Territories legislation

TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen said Friday that she has introduced legislation along with the delegates from the other small territories that cover a wide variety of issues on their respective agendas, according to a news release.

The Omnibus Territories Act was introduced by Delegate Gregorio Sablan, of the Northern

Marianas, and co-sponsored by Christensen and Eni Faleomaevega, of American Samoa, and Madeline Bordallo, of Guam.

"We are introducing our issues in yet another format to increase the chance of passage," Christensen said in a prepared statement.

Virgin Islands items in the bill include:

- Requiring the U.S. Department of the Interior to assemble

technical, policy and financial experts to address the energy needs of the insular areas

- Providing for a popular referendum regarding a chief financial officer for the U.S. Virgin Islands

- Increasing the number of low-income residents eligible for LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) assistance from the federal government

- Establishing the Castle Nugent National Historic Site

- Establishing the St. Croix National Heritage Area

- Adjusting the amount of local/federal fund matching requirements required of each territory

"I would like to thank my colleague Congressman Sablan and his staff for leading on this bill which contains items of importance for all of us," Christensen stated. "Similar legislation will be introduced in the Senate in the upcoming weeks."



Christensen

USVI Economic Development Summit in D.C. to tackle important issues facing the territory

ST. CROIX — At the U.S. Virgin Islands Economic Development Summit, local government officials and industry leaders will come together in Washington, D.C. to exchange ideas and educate attendees on operating a business in the territory.

"This event brings academia, industry, government and Virgin Islanders on the mainland to address important issues with the territory's leaders and is intended to identify ways in which the broader VI diaspora could reconnect and contribute their technical skills and talents to benefit the community, even if remotely," according to a statement from organizers.

The June 7 summit is hosted by the USVI Alliance, with support from the 340 Group. The 340 Group is a collaboration of Virgin Islanders with ideas about economic and community-based initiatives with the

goal of positive, sustainable impacts on their home.

The Alliance includes Lo'an Sewer, Bernard Joseph, Roland Riviere and Zenzilé Hodge.

The genesis of the 2013 USVI Economic Development Summit was the outgrowth of a meeting held by the Alliance earlier this year with Gov. John de Jongh Jr. and VI Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen in Washington, D.C.

Attendees will learn about unique business opportunities in five key areas of expansion and growth in the Virgin Islands: education, energy, information technology, health care and workforce development.

"We are excited to bring this educational summit to the greater Virgin Islands community and set the tone for leaders to engage with the broader range of Virgin Islanders. Many of us have a desire to stay con-

nected and contribute our skills and talents to the advancement of our islands," Sewer said.

Topics at the summit will include the following:

- Christensen will provide an overview of the economic backdrop from a local, national and global perspective

- Best practices in economic development, including sharing success, supporting small businesses, EDC beneficiaries, and revitalizing economic development tools

- The role of academia in economic development

- A keynote address by de Jongh

- Innovation and growth: Doing Business with us today, tomorrow and in the future

- Exploring USVI opportunities

- Connecting the dots — next steps

- Closing remarks by Lt. Gov. Gregory Francis

Three successful Virgin Islanders will moderate the summit.

Lead summit moderator will be Charmaine Slack, a partner at global law firm Jones Day. Prior to attending law school, Slack worked for six years at J.P. Morgan in New York City. Originally from St. Thomas, she is a 1987 graduate of Charlotte Amalie High School, and is an alumna of Pace University, Harvard Law School and New York University School of Law.

Panel moderator Mark Oliver was appointed as the senior advisor for partnership at the U.S. Department of the Interior in Feb. 2013, covering the education, community and volunteerism for the Office of the Secretary. Originally from St. Croix, he is a 1980 graduate of St. Croix Central High School and an alumnus of Morgan State University and Southeastern University.

Panel moderator Adrienne Todman serves as executive director at the District of Columbia Housing Authority, the largest affordable housing provider in the District of Columbia serving over 50,000 residents with an annual budget of \$320 million. Todman, originally from St. Thomas, is a 1988 graduate of Sts. Peter and Paul High School and an alumna of Smith College.

A pre-Summit reception will be held at the U.S. Navy Yards Conference Center on Thursday, June 6 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and will feature performances by the Capitol Quadrille Dancers and Reginald Cyntje Jazz Ensemble, and Virgin Islands delicacies, such as Vienna cakes and tarts, by Afrilasia Joseph-Phipps, originally from St. Croix.

Dress is business attire. Tickets are \$199. Special hotel rates are available for attendees.

EDA:

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net capacity.

Even though one business said Virgin Islands job seekers need more advanced computer skills, Bryan said several companies were interested in bringing jobs here based on the territory's investment in broadband Internet infrastructure. One company would train high school graduates, and another would provide 80 above-median wage jobs, and that number could grow to 200, he said.

Bryan said there have been discussions with a service

that would be paid for the jobs they bring. Having to pay the service only when they bring jobs is an "awesome" opportunity for the territory, and the \$10,000 per job price is a good rate compared to the economic activity that would be brought to the territory.

Bates Trucking and Trash Removal Inc., St. Croix Renaissance Group LLP, and Seven Seas Water Corporation requested changes to their Economic Development Commission benefits.

The EDA staff recommended that Bates not receive benefit extensions, because the financial information they

provided did not give an accurate representation of their financial status. The board agreed unanimously.

Renaissance is requesting an extension of their property tax reduction through 2015, a benefit that saves them about \$370,000 a year.

Jennifer Nugent-Hill, assistant executive director of the EDA, said the company is important because they are doing maintenance on the industrial infrastructure at their South Shore location — and if that work wasn't done the site might be unusable in the future.

"If it's neglected in maintenance it could become a

dinosaur that would cost us if it isn't kept up," Hill said.

Hill said Renaissance is eager in their marketing of the facility, and Bryan said he had a recent meeting with investors that would result in "massive" job creation. He also said there are eight projects being considered for the site that have potential.

Seven Seas Water's reconsideration of EDC benefits was approved. The staff supported it, and the motion passed, with only one board member, Randolph Allen, voting no. Bryan, Jose Penn and Lynn Millin Maduro voted yes. Nathan Simmonds was absent.

The EDA board unanimously approved a board credit card with a limit of \$20,000. Smock said guidelines for the credit card are needed, and a board member said they were already in place.

An EDA marketing event in New York will be held on June 10 and 11, Hill said. Two hotel developers and 40 financial managers have agreed to attend, she said.

"We're expecting a very robust marketing event in New York," Hill said.

There also will be a banking conference in the territory sometime in the first quarter of 2014, Clouden said.